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ABSTRACT

Traditional Japanese values discourage women from working outside the home. This research describes and compares Japanese men's and women's beliefs regarding employment of women. Questionnaires were distributed to approximately 900 Japanese men and women, and t-tests were used to test for differences between the men's and women's groups. Results showed that, despite traditional Japanese ideals discouraging women's employment, both groups tended to be uncertain regarding whether women's employment would have negative effects on marriage or children. Nevertheless, both groups tended to believe that wives/mothers should not be employed when the wife prefers not to work, and when her husband wants her home. Japanese women tended to believe significantly more than Japanese men that women are capable of handling the responsibilities of both the home and career. Japanese men tended to believe significantly more than Japanese women that women should stay home to have and raise children rather than work outside the home, that wives' employment would lead to marital adjustment difficulties, that maternal employment would harm children's development, and that wives/mothers should not be employed when they have preschool-aged, school-aged, or teen-aged children in the family. (Author/ABL)

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Sex Differences in Beliefs Regarding Women's Employment in Japan*

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Japanese values discourage women from working outside the home. This research describes and compares Japanese men's and women's beliefs regarding employment of women. Questionnaires were distributed to approximately 900 Japanese men and women, and *t*-tests were used to test for differences between groups.

Despite traditional Japanese ideals discouraging women's employment, both groups tended to be uncertain regarding whether women's employment would have negative effects on marriage or children. Nevertheless, both groups tended to believe that wives/mothers should not be employed when there is an infant in the family, when the wife prefers not to work, and when her husband wants her home.

Japanese women tended to believe significantly more than Japanese men that women are capable of handling the responsibilities of both home and career. Japanese men tended to believe significantly more than Japanese women that women should stay home to have and raise children rather than work outside the home, that wife's employment would lead to marital adjustment difficulties, that maternal employment would harm children's development, and that wives/mothers should not be employed when they have preschool-aged, school-aged, or teenaged children in the family.

Sex Differences in Beliefs Regarding

Women's Employment in Japan

According to traditional ideals, Japanese women are supposed to be housewives, homemakers and mothers. Indeed, Japanese girls were ideally trained to be "good wives and wise mothers," i.e., to "help (her husband) . . . by sympathy and encouragement, by relieving him of anxieties at home, managing household affairs, looking after the household economy, and . . . tending the old people and bringing up the children in a fit and proper manner (Kikuchi, 1909; cited by Smith, 1983). It's not surprising, then, that Japanese women would be viewed, perhaps stereotyped, in modern times, as model housewives and homemakers.

In effect, traditional ideals discourage Japanese women from working outside the home. Corporations generally assume that young women will leave employment when they marry, so don't invest in their training and benefits as they do for men. Indeed, it is common for young wives to quit work at or soon after marriage. Census data show that Japanese women typically have their first child approximately one year after getting married (Kumagai, 1984). Then, following contemporary ideals, Japanese women commonly take on the roles of kyoiku mama (i.e., "education mother") and focus their attention on tutoring, educating, and coordinating the education of their children (Simons, 1987). To the extent that the "education mother" is successful, her children (particularly sons) get into good

schools, pass the required exams, and eventually get into the right university, which leads eventually to life-time employment with good salary and benefits in a large corporation. The responsibilities of "education mother" leave little or no time for employment. Again, the cultural ideal is imcompatible with women's employment.

Nevertheless, recent changes in the life cycle of the Japanese family may result in increasing employment of women. Delayed marriage, early childbearing, declining fertility, a very short childbearing period, an extended postparental period, and increasing longevity (Asahi News Service, 1988; Kumagai, 1984), leave contemporary Japanese women with more years free of child-rearing responsibilities. Smaller families, modern child care and educational resources, and economic changes provide increased freedom and motivation for mothers to be employed outside the home.

Whether Japanese women seek employment outside the home and how satisfied they are with their choices and life styles will be influenced by their attitudes and beliefs regarding employment of women and its potential effects on marriage and child development. Similarly, women's employment will be facilitated or hampered by the beliefs and attitudes of men as well as women. Indeed, early research carried out in the United States (Gianopulos & Mitchell, 1957; Nye, 1961) suggests that marital maladjustment is associated with husband's negative attitudes. Similarly, clinical experience suggests that employment of

wife/mother is an issue leading to stress and conflict in some families. Clearly, men's beliefs about women's employment are important. Differences in attitudes may be a source of stress and conflict between men and women. The purpose of this study is to explore Japanese men's and women's beliefs and attitudes related to women's employment, and to determine the extent to which they differ on these issues.

Method

As part of a larger study of Japanese work/family values, a questionnaire was designed to assess attitudes and beliefs about men's and women's work and family roles. The questionnaire included items that had been used in previous research (Engel, 1978, 1985, and 1986) on work/family roles. Items offered a Likert scale response format: strongly agree to strongly disagree. Questionnaires were pretested on American subjects, revised, translated into Japanese; then the Japanese version was "back translated" (Brislin, 1980) into English and revised to maximize translation accuracy.

Questionnaires were distributed to over 900 (433 men, 481 women) middle-class Japanese adults. The mean age of Japanese men was 34 years compared with 29 years for women. Men had an average of 15 years of education compared with 14 years for women. Seventy-four percent of men and 46 percent of women were currently married. Both men and women (who were parents)

reported having an average of two children. Men reported an average household size of 3.27 people while women reported an average household size of 3.55 people. Eighty-nine percent of men were employed compared with 61 percent of the women.

Mean scores were calculated for each group on each item, and *t*-tests were used to test for differences between men and women.

Findings

The mean response to each belief item by each group and the results of *t*-tests comparing men and women are summarized in Table 1. Japanese men and women were found to differ significantly on eight of eleven items.

Despite Japanese traditional ideals for "good wives and wise mothers" and "education mothers," the men's group tended to be uncertain while the women's group tended not to believe (Item 1) that married women should be home, having or raising children, instead of being employed outside the home. This may be an indication of social change. It appears that many of the men and and women in this study are beginning to reject this traditional ideal for women's roles. At the same time, women rejected the ideal signficantly more than did men. It may be that Japan is and will follow a pattern of "liberation" similar to that experienced in the United States a decade earlier, in which women and their values changed more and first, followed later by men.

While both men and women tended to be uncertain, men tended

to believe significantly more strongly than women that wives' employment is likely to harm marriages (Item 2) and maternal employment is likely to harm children (Item 3). Given such differences in belief and expectations, it should not be surprising if women's employment is an issue leading to stress and conflict between spouses in Japanese marriages.

Both men and women indicated uncertainty regarding whether they could be happy as a full-time "housewife/househusband" (Item 4). Given the heavy emphasis, in Japanese traditional ideals, on homemaking and motherhood as a profession (Simons, 1987), it is surprising that the women didn't indicate more agreement with this item. Clearly, the women's group sampled in this study does not hold strong traditional values, at least in terms of homemaking. Again, this may be an indication of social change. In addition, it suggests that the views of Japanese women portrayed in American literature (i.e., their being very traditional) may be outdated.

The data on men's feelings about being a "househusband" are difficult to interpret. Given traditional Japanese ideals for men that emphasize their breadwinning roles, one might expect men to reject househusband roles for themselves. In this case, the lack of rejection could be interpreted in terms of changing attitudes. However, there is no Japanese word for "househusband," and the Japanese version of the questionnaire used a word that was probably misunderstood. Indeed, there is little or no evidence of men switching roles in Japan as in

America; and the concept is alien and probably misunderstood by Japanese subjects. Japanese workers have been found to work more than American workers, and to desire more leisure than they have (Engel, 1985, 1986). As is common in Japan, the men surveyed in this study worked an average nine hour day, six days per week. They may have interpreted this item in terms of a desire for more leisure and time at home.

While Japanese women tended to believe that women are capable of handling both home and career (Item 5), Japanese men were significantly less certain about this. Again, such differences in beliefs could lead to stress and conflict in some Japanese families.

Both Japanese men and women agreed that mothers should not work outside the home when there is an infant in the family (Item 6). However, significant differences were found between groups when the item focused on preschool-aged (Item 7), school-aged (Item 8), and teenage children (Item 9). In each case when the child was older than an infant, men tended to believe that mothers should not work outside the home, while women tended to be uncertain about this. While the men seem to be traditional in their beliefs, the women seem to be rejecting or at least questionning cultural ideals. This may be an indication of growing dissatisfaction with the roles of "education mothers" and a harbinger of future change. It may also be another potential stressor and source of conflict for Japanese families.

Both Japanese men and women agreed that women shouldn't have

to work unless they want to (Item 10). They also agreed that a wife shouldn't work outside the home if her husband wants her home (Item 11). This latter belief has potential implications for how male/female differences may be expressed in behaviors and social change. Women who believe that they should follow their husband's leadership may experience more frustration and stress as their behaviors are not consistent with their beliefs. On the other hand, traditional submission to husbands' leadership, may maintain the appearance of harmony in the family, despite differences in values and beliefs that would normally lead to stress and conflict in American families. Indeed, assumed or planned traditional submission to husband's authority may minimize conflict and could account for subjects' uncertainty (on Items 2 & 3) regarding potential harm to marriage and children.

Any conclusions or generalizations from the data of this research should take into account that the nonrandom sample might not adequately represent Japanese society as a whole. The subjects tended to be primarily middle class, as are most Japanese. No effort was made to control for age, marital, parental, or employment status. Nearly 50% of the women (vs. 25% of men) were unmarried, and their values may become more traditional as they experience marriage and parenthood.

Conclusion

Following Japanese traditional homogeneity of values and

idealization of homemaker roles, the subjects of this study believed that wives/mothers should not be employed when there is an infant in the family, when the wife prefers not to work, and when her husband wants her home.

Japanese men and women were found to differ in some of their beliefs and attitudes regarding employment of women. Japanese women tended to believe significantly more than Japanese men that women are capable of handling the responsibilities of both home and career. Japanese men tended to believe significantly more than Japanese women that women should stay home to have and raise children rather than work outside the home, that wife's employment would lead to marital adjustment difficulties, that maternal employment would harm children's development, and that wives/mothers should not be employed when they have preschool-aged, school-aged, or teenaged children in the family. Differences between Japanese men and women could result in stress and conflict related to employment issues in Japanese families.

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Table 1
Sex Differences in Beliefs Regarding Women's Employment in Japan

Attitude or Belief	Men (n = 433) Mean	Women (n = 481) Mean	t
1. Married women should be home, having or raising children, instead of being employed outside the home.	3.02	2.43	8.57***
2. Difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment when the wife is employed outside the home.	3.35	3.17	3.01**
3. Maternal employment is likely to have harmful effects on children's development.	3.18	2.88	4.50***
4. I could be happy as a full-time housewife/househusband.	3.17	2.99	2.70**
5. Women are capable of handling both home and career.	3.46	3.70	-3.87***
6-11. GIVEN THAT A FAMILY HAS ADEQUATE FINANCIAL SUPPORT, A WIFE/MOTHER SHOULD NOT WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME . . .			
6. ... when there is an infant in the family.	4.08	3.98	1.45
7. ... when there is a preschool-age child in the family.	3.69	3.45	3.59***
8. ... when there is a school-age child in the family.	3.51	3.30	3.28**
9. ... when there is a teenage child in the family.	3.50	3.30	2.97**
10. ... when she doesn't want to work outside the home.	3.58	3.62	-0.52
11. ... when husband wants her home.	3.67	3.58	1.45

Note. Means were calculated from Likert scale scores, i.e., 1 = "strongly disagree," 2 = "disagree," 3 = "uncertain," 4 = "agree," and 5 = "strongly agree."
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.